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Analyzing the Causes of the Dissolution of the Former Yugoslav Federation from the Perspective of Ethnicity Relations

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Abstract

The split and continual civil war of Yugoslav, which once caused deep concern by the international community, has its complex specific reasons. But for a long time, the tense relations among the ethnic groups are the underlying factors that caused the disintegration of Yugoslav. The harmonious ethnicity relations will promote national prosperity. Otherwise, it will accelerate its demise. Some Chinese experts and scholars have begun to ponder over the development and the future of Chinese socialism. They are aware of the significance to constitute a reasonable ethnic policy to deal with ethnicity relations. This paper tries to give a systematic analysis of the breakup of the former Yugoslav Federation from the perspective of ethnicity relations. And it also tries to get something of inspiration.

Keywords: ethnic relation, disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, reason, inspiration

1. Introduction

Every ethnic group of human society has a long and complex process of growth. Once an ethnic group forms, it has become a force in the local social life that cannot be overlooked. Due to the numerous migrations in history, majorities of the countries are multiethnic. How to treat the structural differences (such as population, occupation, industry, income, education, etc.) and cultural differences among the ethic groups, how to protect and safeguard the legal statuses and fundamental rights of all ethnic groups to achieve the equality in practice and how to constitute the corresponding ethnic policy according to the facts of the country, are the important prerequisite and core issue resulting in the good interethnic relations. If a country has a harmonious relations of ethnic groups, it can enhance the cohesiveness of all citizens continuously by the positive internal integration, thereby reducing the costs of social operation and management, improving the efficiency of social organizations and economic entities, and achieving economic prosperity. In the society where politics, economy and culture develop in healthy and comprehensive way, all ethnic groups will share the fruit produced by the economic development and the powerful country. Although all the ethnic groups cannot be achieved absolute equality in the distribution of the various interests, in a certain sense, they are all winners in the process of the game. If a state can not handle the internal relations of ethnic groups properly, the vicious internal conflicts will further lead to an increased centrifugal force, and the increased social cost for the maintenance of the social order, financial, human and material resources, which will raise the government expenditure and the people's tax burden. If contradictions among ethnic groups deteriorate into open political conflicts and separatist movements, they will make the entire community collapse, leading to civil war and foreign invasion. Thus the state will be weakened sharply or divided into parts. While in chaos or in a war, the economic base and various facilities will be destroyed. Therefore, all ethnic groups in the country will suffer a political division and economic decline. As a result, in this process, we can say that all the ethnic groups in the country are ultimately LOSERS. (Rong, Ma.2004.). The disintegration of the former Yugoslav Federation is the result of the deterioration of relations among the ethnic groups.

1.1 The historical factors foreshadow the evolution of the subsequent ethnicity relations in Yugoslavia.

Slavs is one of the three major tribes in Europe and originally it distributed in the east to the Vistula rive, north to the Carpathian Mountains, west to the Dnieper River, and in the vast area to the south of the Baltic Sea. During 6 to 7 AD, some Slavs moved to the south. They crossed Carpathian, arrived at the vicinity of the Danube basin and the Balkans, and settled down there. They were the South Slavs and gradually divided into nations of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia. Since the 4th century, the national states such as Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia and Macedonia have formed. But it was not too long before this region was forced to be ruled by foreign ethnic group. Serbia in the 10th century was subjected to Byzantine Empire. And in the 11th century it became the Kingdom of Serbia. But in the second half of the 14th century, the Ottoman Empire conquered Serbia, and swallowed Bosnia-Herzegovina and parts of Montenegro and Macedonia. Since then, the Ottoman Empire had ruled it for nearly five centuries. Slovenia and Croatia were under the

rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Since war of Russia and Turkey (828-1829), Serbia had become autonomous principality in the sovereignty of Turkey and under the protection of Russia. Serbia won independence in 1879 and became the Kingdom in 1882. From 1912 to 1913, Serbia participated in the Balkans war and doubled its size of the territory. After World War I, Austro-Hungarian Empire was disintegrated. Slovenia and Croatia demanded the merger with the winners of the Kingdom of Serbia and Montenegro Kingdom to form a country of the southern Slavs. In 1918, Serbia merged into Montenegro. On December 1 of the same year, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Herzegovina merged into Serbia. Serbia-Croatia-Slovenia Kingdom was set up. Kalajiao became the king. In January 1929, King Alexander I changed the country's name to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This is the first historical Yugoslavia. During World War II, Germany, Italy and other fascist troops invaded Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav people of all nationalities in the South, led by the Yugoslavia Communist Party with Josip Broz Tito as the leader, had four years of hard and bitter struggles and on May 15, 1945 liberated the whole country. On November 29 of the same year the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was established. In 1974 it was renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The newly born Yugoslav Federation had roughly the same territory as that of the previous World War II, in addition to the increased northwest Leah Peninsula. It stood with Italy to the northwest, Austria and Hungary to the north, Romania and Bulgaria to the east, Greece and Albania to the south. The Adriatic Sea was to its west. The total area was 255,800 square km. It was composed by the six Republics of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia, in addition to the Vojvodina and Kosovo autonomous provinces, which belonged to the Republic of Serbia.

By the time of the disintegration, the former Yugoslav Federation had a population of nearly 24 million. Serbs accounted for 36.3%; Croat 19.8%, Slovenian 7.8%, Macedonian 6%, Muslim 8.9%, Albanian 7.7%, Yugoslav 5.4% and Hungarian 1.9%. Belgrade, the capital, had a population of 1.5 million.

1.2 The complex relations of the various ethnic groups resulting in numerous conflicts make Yugoslavia in political unrest.

The increasing acute contradictions among ethnic groups are the major factors leading to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Although the majorities of Yugoslav are all Slavs branches, in the long process of development, different clan groups came into being. In history, these peoples were under the rule of the neighboring countries and in a fragmented state for many times. So there appeared a geographical distribution of a large mixed settlement or small clusters. But the internal strife had continued. As for the Yugoslav Federation, which set up after the Second World War, its six republics all set up as main ethnic components. But not a single nation had one nationality. Take Serbian of the largest population as an example, most of them dwelt in the Republic of Serbia. And there were 3 million people in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina Republic. And the other nations also had the similar circumstances. In addition, the Yugoslav Federation after World War II had committed a series of mistakes in the national policy. Thus, the long-standing feuds among the various ethnic groups burst forth in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the international climate and ethnic separatism swept over the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Europe. The inherent cohesion in each ethnic group led to opposite choices concerning the independence or unification of all the republics. Then armed conflicts broke out. The upgrade accelerated the process of the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation. Among all the ethnic conflicts of the former Yugoslav, the followings are the most acute.

1.2.1 Conflicts between Serbians and Croatians

Croatia has 600,000 Serbs, accounting for 12 percent of the population of the Croatia republic. Their inhabited area was almost a quarter of the republic territory. During World War II, the puppet of the Republic of Croatia supported by the Nazis massacred numerous Serbs, causing hostility between the two nations. After the 1990's election, when leaders of Croatia wanted to break away from Yugoslavia to be independent, the local Serbs were worried that the tragedy in World War II would recur. So in early 1991, they announced the establishment of Krajina Serb Autonomous Region. It broke away from Croatia and became part of Serbia and the Federal Yugoslavia. This was supported by Serbia but rejected by Croatia. Then the conflicts broke out.

1.2.2 Conflicts between Serbians and the Bosnian Muslims

In the 1970s, the then Yugoslav leader wanted to weaken and restrict the biggest Republic of Serbia, so listed the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina who believed in Islam as a separate Muslims. So the Serbs of majorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina were divided into two nationalities by religion. Muslims, accounting for 40 percent of the total population became the largest nation while the Serbs only accounting for one third. The artificial division in accordance with religious belief was unique in the world. However it resulted in a unique ethnic contradiction in Bosnia. When Bosnian Muslims and Croatians took majority vote on breaking away for independence from Yugoslavia, Serbs revolted and occupied two thirds of Bosnia and Herzegovina supported by the former Yugoslavia army. On August 12, 1992, the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina republic issued a declaration of setting up a new country of their own in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was the Republic of Serbia with the National Flag of tricolors, red, blue and white. As large as Republic of Serbia, it included all the places in Bosnia that the Serbs lived in and the place where Muslims and Croats implemented genocide during World War II. The decision of Serbs caused the further upgrade of the conflicts in Bosnia

and Herzegovina.

1.2.3 Conflicts between Croatians and the Bosnian Muslims

Croats accounted for 18 percent of the total population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the conflict of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croats was once hand in hand with Muslims into a military alliance. But later the Croats announced the establishment of an independent Croatia in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which made Muslims lose the actual territory. So conflict between the two nationalities broke out.

1.2.4 Conflicts between Serbs and the Kosovo Muslims

Kosovo was an autonomous province in the Republic of Serbia. In the then population of 12 million, the Muslim Albanians had 40 percent of the total. They had a long feud with the Serbs. So they felt like getting rid of the control of Serbia to establish an independent republic, or even to merge with the neighboring Albania, which was rejected by the Serbs.

1.2.5 Conflicts between Serbs and Slovenians

There had existed differences and contradictions between the two nationalities for a long time. On June 25, 1991, shortly after their declaration of independence, the armed conflict broke out.

1.3 The ethnic policies and system arrangements by the former Yugoslav leaders did not regulate ethnicity relations and ease the contradictions. On the contrary, they aggravated the tense situation in Yugoslavia.

League of Communists of Yugoslavia was the first to get rid of the Soviet model within the socialist camp and form a socialist country with its own characteristics. Contrary to the former Soviet Union, which ignored the uniqueness of every nationality, Yugoslavia went to another extreme by excessively emphasizing it. Too much emphasis on the personality of a nationality undermined the authority of the State authority, foreshadowing the hidden trouble of the disintegration of the country.

Yugoslavia in the 1960s conducted a universal discussion entitled “Are You a Yugoslav?” The result, of the discussion was that: Yugoslavia only existed in the eyes of the foreign countries. Within the country, every person belonged to a specific nationality. So the federal powers were decentralized continually to each republic and autonomous province. By 1974 when the Constitution was passed, federal authority almost had no power left. Even cadres of federal agencies were appointed or selected by the republics or autonomous provinces. And the national decision-making should be determined by consensus of the republics and autonomous provinces. As a matter of fact, every republic or autonomous province had the right of veto. Many important issues could be discussed without any results or could be decided with no implementation. The internal power of Yugoslav Communist Party was decentralized. From 1969, the Ninth General Assembly of the League of Communist of Yugoslavia, members of the leading body had not been elected by the National People's Congress any longer, but by the General Assembly on behalf of the republics and the autonomous provinces at the allocated names and got endorsed by the General Assembly. It is difficult for the leading organizations of the Party Central Committee to form a strong core. All these foreshadowed a huge hidden danger of system for the disintegration.

Tito died in 1980. Many questions originally covered now came to the surface and gradually evolved into crises. In 1986, League of Communists of Yugoslavia carried out a fierce internal debate on the country’s political system. It focused on the power problems of the Federal government and the republics. But a big difference appeared and any consensus was not reached. In later years, as the international climate changed and the domestic economic crisis deepened, the disintegration of the country was becoming evident. In January 1990, League of Communists of Yugoslavia held its 14^{th} General Assembly. Due to the different opinions, the representatives of Slovenia announced their withdrawal from the General Assembly and triggered a chain reaction. The General Assembly got into halfway indefinite adjournment. After that, all the republics and autonomous provinces renamed their states. Thus League of Communists of Yugoslavia with 70 years of history disappeared. Political parties continued to emerge. From April to December of 1990, there had appeared some 300 political parties in the republics for only eight months. Extreme nationalism overran. Bloody conflicts at a small-scale occurred repeatedly. All these finally triggered the overall war. The Bosnian war claimed more than 20 million lives and more than 2 million people became refugees and the economic loss was more than 100 billion US dollars. However, if the loss of material property could be compensated, the spiritual wound cannot be healed. It is unprecedented difficult or impossible to reestablish the once harmonious ethnicity relations in the history of Yugoslavia.

1.4 The imbalance and downturn in economic development of the post-war republics, to a large extent, further deteriorated the ethnicity relations and deepened the contradictions. So the political situations were more volatile.

After World War II, from 1950s to the middle of 1970s, Yugoslav’s economy developed faster. But there was a hidden danger, that is, the imbalance in regional economic growth. Croatia and Slovenia relatively, especially Slovenia, developed faster. Their population accounted for 27.6 percent of the total former Yugoslavia, and covered 30 percent of the total land, but social output value accounts for 42.1 per cent and exports 46.3 percent of the whole Yugoslavia. So

there was a big gap of income between the two countries and the less developed regions of Yugoslavia (such as the autonomous province of Kosovo of Serbia Republic, Montenegro Republic, the Republic of Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina Republic). For example, provided Yugoslav per capita social value index is 100 in 1989, Slovenia will be 203, Croatia128, and the last on the top Kosovo only 23. The gap ratio of Slovenia and Kosovo will be 8.8 to 1. In 1991 the per capita GNP of Slovenia was 12520 US dollars, Croatia 7110 US dollars, Serbia 4950 US dollars, Macedonia 3330 US dollars, while Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina and other backward areas were less than 3000 US dollars.

Because the former Yugoslavia prescribed that all the republics and the autonomous provinces must provide funds for the underdeveloped regions (A certain percentage deduction was drawn from the salary of each employee monthly), year after year, Croatia and Slovenia thought it was other republics that hindered their economic development. And it was uneconomical to stay in the Yugoslav Federation. Therefore they were the first to declare independence. In addition, Yugoslavia had a long-term decline in economy since the mid-1970s. 1990's GDP was back to that of 1979. Inflation became increasingly serious. The unemployment rate was leaping. All these exacerbated the political turbulence.

1.5 The powerful external interference, the incited social conflicts, religious and ethnic conflicts, and the explosive ethnic hatred aggravated the tense situation of Yugoslavia.

Although the disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation mainly resulted from the domestic political, ideological, socio-economic and ethnic contradictions in the history, the involvement of external factors also played a big role.

In recent years, the Western countries had implemented a strategy against Yugoslavia: disintegrating Yugoslavia after Tito. In order to achieve this strategic goal, for a long time, the Western countries did the utmost to publicize the threats. They said the threats Yugoslavia had confronted were from the East, from the Soviet Union and the military interference of Warsaw Pact. At the same time, they tried every means to incite the social, religious and ethnic conflicts. In particular, after Yugoslavia implemented a multiparty system in 1990, a complicated situation of "one country, three systems" provided an opportunity for foreign interference. The Western media vigorously publicized the new regime of Slovenia and Croatia to be a "young democratic regime", while derogated Serbia to be "the last bastion of Bolshevik in Europe". Slovenia and Croatia were under the reign of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for nearly two centuries and the two countries had a far-reaching historical origin with Germany, Austria and Hungary. So Germany, Austria and Hungary fully supported their independence and succeeded in expanding their land in Kosovo, Slovenia and Croatia by the excuses of the nationalists calling for independence. They also provided Slovakia and Croatia claiming for independence with large quantities of weapons, fund, materials and other assistance. All of these pricked up the tension in Yugoslavia to a large extent, and eventually caused the disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation.

2. Concluding remarks

The disintegration of former Yugoslavia, its successor of the new Yugoslavia, and the Serbia-Bosnia-Herzegovina gives us a most important revelation. In the first place, a country must have a strong nationality as a principal part. In China we must establish a philosophy that it is glorious to be a member of Han nationality. We must pay more attention to the public opinion of Han nationality, set up a sound democratic system and cultivate most people's consciousness of the master of the country. Second, there was an old concept, which was considered to be quite right for a long time. All nationalities are brothers. China is a large family with all nationalities living together. All the ethnic groups should get an equitable development. Han chauvinism should be fought against and minorities be fostered. I think, the concept and practice will only weaken the strength of Han nationality, and destroy its self-esteem, self-confident. self-love and self-improvement, deepen the ethnic hostile to Han, and enhance the sense and ethnic forces of the minorities. The consequence will step into the shoes of the former Yugoslavia and the new Yugoslavia.

References

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